Close Up View of Gen. Pershing at Work

American Commander, Calmly Confident, Inspires All With His Masterful Grasp of the Situation

GENERAL PERSHING © COMM ON PUBLIC INFORMATION

"WHEN this war is over and the defeated Hun has retreated to his last fastness I shall be able to correct my notes and fill in the names and dates purposely left blank to comply with the laws of the service. Until then I implore you to call it anything but a diary, for we are forbidden to keep such a thing. You may do what you like with these pencil marks otherwise."

This is the answer sent back to the writer, who had asked his old friend Lieut. Blank of Pershing's Corps of Interpreters for permission to compile certain notes of his which had passed the censor in the form of the running story that follows.

In almost his earliest letter he had explained his being in this branch of the service.

"Long before the draft," he wrote, "and wishing to volunteer where I might best be of service, I went to Washington to pass examinations for the Intelligence department. Three languages are required: English, French and German or Italian. I possessed in a colloquial way all the four. Having passed the exams successfully I returned to my home to wait for an appointment.

Waited Long for Assignment.

"Days went by, then weeks, then months. Under the minutiæ of a tremendous undertaking like a draft my small affair had been submerged. When I had well nigh forgotten all about it I received my commission and a telegram from the War Department giving me three days to get ready and ordering me to a certain port to take passage on a transport, my ultimate destination being Gen. Pershing's headquarters in France. Early in September of 1917 I set out from America for a port in France."

Some of the Lieutenant's notes follow:

SEPTEMBER—On board are two other men holding rank like myself and attached to the Intelligence. The others in khaki are the best type of youth of our country, many of them country bred, ranging in age from mere lads to men nearing 30, all of them courageous, adventurous, high spirited, light hearted, cool headed. A few were shrewd observers of the times and men, and with our keen national sense of humor. An uneventful voyage and a quiet landing at a port in France.

SEPTEMBER—One day in a rest camp, curiously observed by the French nurses and orderlies and wounded soldiers. From there ordered to proceed to B——, where I was met by a laconic order signed by Pershing's Chief of Staff, James S. Harboard. Strange that one should pass through a city teeming with historical and archæological interests without a glance at them! One's whole mind is centred on the war.

Never Saw General at All.

SEPTEMBER—If I expected to report to Gen. Pershing in person on arriving at headquarters I was undeceived by fellow officers of the corps who rode on the train with me. One of them explained that Gen. Pershing was at the moment in Lorraine and another remarked that he had been at his duties for a year and yet he had never seen the American commander face to face.

Then followed a somewhat alarming exposition of the busy days of the Intelligence. Thousands of officers of all grades in the service do not understand or speak French. Officers of the medical staff too often lack the essential so that interpreters are required in all transactions with French officers and civilians, railroad officials and, in a word, all the French world. There are, besides, translations to make of countless documents from French, German and Italian into English and the opposite; translations into various tongues of contracts, orders, civil, military, official, of every description.

Merely to read these papers and translate their meaning orally, as well as to carry on numerous interpretative interviews, I was informed, was only part of our job, a task that was always beginning and never finished.

OCTOBER—Cordially received by Gen. Pershing's aid and informed that by good fortune I should not be billeted but could take up quarters in a small hotel.

At reveille reported for duty at headquarters. Detailed to Major W——, and journey in his company to a small city to the south of A——, where a rest camp and hospital preparations were making. Our purpose was to meet the Mayor and City Councillors in a discussion of means for installing a chlorination plant for purifying the water.

OCTOBER—I have had my first view of the wounded being taken in ambulances to base hospitals. I appreciate for the first time that the dull, continuous roar I hear is not the grumbling of the elements, as it very well might be under the leaden and threatening sky, but the roar of distant big guns.

Tired Soldiers Full of Life.

I see for the first time too soldiers coming out of the trenches on a relief. They are French, bluish in complexion, covered with dust or caked mud, their legs tied about with rags or wisps of straw. They march with a dog tired air and seem almost too tired to be alive, except for their eyes. These have a far away look, seeming not to see what is in front of them, but glinting like metal when a ray of the sun strikes it. No, these soldiers are not lifeless!

OCTOBER—I am assigned to an officer of the chief of the medical staff of the American Expeditionary Force. For a time my work will be to go about with him interviewing civil officials on points of sanitation. My comrade, who has never spoken to Gen. Pershing, has a more interesting service. He goes to nearby villages to purchase straw, potatoes, vegetables, meats and arranges for the billeting of troops.

NOVEMBER—Supplementary order from the chief calls for my presence at "big headquarters" from 1 to 5 daily.

NOVEMBER—Gen. Petain pays a visit to Gen. Pershing. Active preparations were made for the reception of a visitor of rank, but we do not know whether he is of the military or civilian class. Gen. Pershing, they tell me, never neglects a circumstance which shall manifest his appreciation of the dignity of his country, and while he is simple in his own manners he knows well how to put up the necessary "front."

In company with the staff I ride to the place, bordered by plane trees, now leafless, where we line up to await the arrival of the visitor. The word passes that he is Petain. It is followed by his appearance at the farther end of the place.

As he rides under an archway of twined French and American flags with an escort great in number, perfectly groomed and mounted, Gen. Pershing rides in from the other side attended by a half dozen of his immediate military family. The two Generals meet midway and salute each other ceremoniously. The French band plays "The Star Spangled Banner" and the American band follows with the "Marseillaise." The citizens, mostly collected from adjoining villages, shout and wave their handkerchiefs. Then the Generals ride off to headquarters and we follow.

NOVEMBER—Every American General has his own personal interpreter attached to his staff. Once when Gen. Pershing's man fell ill it seemed that I should replace him and for a short time I did part of his work. Then I saw Gen. Pershing frequently. As far as it was possible his workroom has been made to resemble an American office. A flat topped desk, a cabinet or two for papers, a long table covered with maps, another holding specimens of grains, vegetables (dried), coffees, &c., maps on the wall—it is possible to picture it as being without a conventional army air.

Nevertheless there was a military discipline of the strictest. Gen. Pershing preserves wherever he is a firm if gentle discipline. His glance is gentle but penetrating, his manner is pleasant but cold. In conversation he uses only as many words as are necessary. I cannot say that I ever had a conversation with him; he gave me instructions and I bowed my head. That was all.

Works Harder Than Staff.

Gen. Pershing works harder than any member of his staff. He familiarizes himself with detail in a surprising degree, so much so that if a subaltern making a report stumbles the general in chief is able to correct him. It is as though he was not after information so much as confirmation when he listens to a report. This holds good in matters of topography, commissariat, troops, everything.

The impression he gives is that things are safe in his hands. The men trust him but don't idolize him. There is no Napoleonic magnetism in this American, but something better, more modern and more enduring. He earns confidence and does not compel it.

My function while under his eye was to stand as a buffer between him and visitors. In his stead I received important Americans, important officers of the Red Cross and Y. M. C. A., also French officers and civilians of rank. It was my business to judge whether any of these was entitled to a few minutes of the overoccupied commanding General's time. This kept me busy from 8 A. M. to 11 P. M.

DECEMBER—Toward Christmas I began to see our American soldiers going by the thousand up for their final training

Interpreter's Notes Reveal Absolute Realization of the Task and the Ability to Handle It

and at length entering the trenches. Gay, courageous, redhot for the fray, they constituted a genuine reenforcement. Before they began passing through I had seen as many French and English wounded. I never saw a man of either nation so badly hurt that he would not assert, sometimes in husky whisper, all the voice left to him, his perfect confidence that the German armies would be overthrown.

I talked with many German prisoners. The privates to a man are glad to get out of the fighting; they say they expect to be well treated and fed as prisoners. With the officers it is different. I spoke to one to-day; sullen was he, and surly, looking revenge he was powerless to act. He accepts every bit of kindness as his right. The German arrogance begins where one would naturally look for it, at the top.

How Christmas Was Spent.

CHRISTMAS—Spent the day before Noel in the vicinity of a sector held by our own fellows. I meet a good many of them in the Y. M. C. A. huts. Some of these boys have already received Christmas gifts and letters from home—comfort kits, sweaters, socks, candy, a victrola. They are a happy lot, feeling the interest of their countrymen deeply and bound to be worth it. They like the French and the French like them. As one New Yorker said to me: "It's great sport being an American boy in France; he can have most anything he wants."

JANUARY—After the holiday season I am ordered on a tour to the west and north of T——. I spend nearly every night near the lines with American soldiers in the Y. M. C. A. huts looking at moving pictures. The Y. M. C. A. are doing a wonderful work in general and the movies is not the least part of it. But they overlook the comedy film. The pictures to send are those which evoke honest laughter. A good funny film is worth ten dozen that tell sad stories of death and unrequited love.

Americans Wholly In It.

MARCH—The big drive so long threatened is on. Our Americans are in it and more are going. They are going in all the time to replace dead beat French and wounded Britishers. I met an ambulance full of Americans whom I had seen at T——. All were wounded, some of them seriously. One boy whispered to me—his voice was gone: "If the Kaiser hopes to lick the good old U. S. A. he's a nut!"

Nothing has happened to me that hasn't happened to thousands of others; my own adventures are not worth this note keeping. At headquarters we are busy all the time, busy when he's here (I mean the General), busier when he is away. There is no gossip; we know very little more of what they are thinking at home than we do of what they are thinking at Berlin. What we are sure of is ultimate success, and we derive our confidence from Gen. Pershing. His very simplicity of expression and bearing confirms it in us. His words are few, pointed but polite, his manner is perfectly calm and firm. A lesser man would have sunk beneath half of his burdens; he could carry more than he has to—in fact, we think he is the right man on the job.

Trials of Compositors

THE story is told of a Scottish compositor who fled from Edinburgh to London in order to escape the brain exhausting ordeal of deciphering Carlyle's hieroglyphics and putting them into type. He had been at work in London some time, when one day a "take" of Carlyle's copy was given to him to set up.

The sight of it appalled him.

"Is that man here too?" he exclaimed. Whereupon he laid down his composing stick, put on his coat and hat and vanished.

Balzac's copy was also a nightmare to compositors. According to one authority, the failure of the establishment that printed his works was the direct result of the enormous labor spent in making corrections in the proofs of his manuscripts.